

CHAPTER 30

Al-Rûm: The Romans

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 6 *sections*; 60 *verses*)

The chapter receives its name from the important prophecy regarding the victory of *the Romans* over the Persians, who, at the time of the prophecy, had overrun the whole of the Roman Empire and were almost knocking at the gates of Constantinople. But the importance of this chapter does not lie in this prophecy alone, but in another and a grander prophecy declared along with it. This is the prophecy of the victory of the Muslims over their mighty foe, the Quraish; a circumstance which, in the light of all events on which human inference could be based, was an impossibility. This prophecy saw its fulfilment in the battle of Badr, which took place in the same year as the victory of the Romans over the Persians. Indeed, the one thing common to this group of the four chapters, 29th, 30th, 31st and 32nd, which begin with *alif lam mîm*, is the grand and majestic utterance that a great nation was about to be raised from the dead land of Arabia, and this prophecy, though clearly mentioned in all these chapters, finds the clearest expression here. The date of revelation of this chapter is put by the best authorities in the sixth or seventh year before the Hijrah.

The chapter opens with a reference to the Roman defeat, and immediately declares a prophecy of Rome's triumph over her foe, and adds a prophecy of a great Muslim victory over their oppressors at the same time. The second section speaks of the two parties of believers and disbelievers, stating that their respective conditions will soon be reversed, the Muslims getting the upper hand. The third section refers to the manifestation of Divine power in nature as an indication that a manifestation of the same power will bring about the triumph of Islâm. The fourth section shows that the religious triumph of Islâm is a certainty, because, responding as it does to human nature and answering all the requisites of the natural way of life as prescribed by Allâh of human beings, it must ultimately appeal to human being's nature and be accepted universally. This triumph, it is stated in the next section, was to be accomplished by a great and wonderful transformation in Arabia. Those who doubted the accomplishment of such a revolution, on account of the mighty opposition to the

progress of Islâm, are told in the concluding section that the overthrow of opposition was absolutely certain.

SECTION 1: A Great Prophecy

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 *alif lâm mîm*

2 The Romans are vanquished^a

3 In a near land, and they, after their defeat, will gain victory^a

2a. The people of the empire called themselves Romans, and to them Greek, which was synonymous with heathen, was a term of reproach (Butler's *Arab Conquest of Egypt*, footnote, page 141).

3a. The struggle between Persia and the Roman Empire had existed for a long time. The great struggle, in which Persia was victorious, began in 602 of the Christian era, when Chosroes II of Persia began war with Rome to avenge the death of Maurice, who was murdered by Phocas. "His armies plundered Syria and Asia Minor, and in 608 advanced to Chalcedon. In 613 and 614 Damascus and Jerusalem were taken by the General Shahabaraz, and the Holy Cross was carried away in triumph. Soon after, even Egypt was conquered. The Romans could offer but little resistance, as they were torn by internal dissensions and pressed by the Avars and Slavs" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Art. "Chosroes II"). When the news of this conquest reached Makkah, the Quraish were jubilant, as their sympathies were with the fire-worshipping Persians more than with the Christians, who, being the followers of the scriptures, were classed by them with the Muslims. It was in the year 615 or 616 that this revelation came to the Prophet, containing two different prophecies, one about the vanquishment of the victorious Persians, who had reached the very gates of Constantinople, by the Romans, who were by this time quite exhausted, and the other about the vanquishment of the powerful Makkans by the handful of persecuted Muslims.

It is noteworthy that a time limit was also announced along with these two prophecies, during which they would be brought to fulfilment. The word *bi`* occurring in the beginning of the next verse means *from three to nine* years, both inclusive, according to the best authorities (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward

William Lane). It was exactly within nine years, in the year 624 of the Christian era, that the tables were turned against the powerful Persian Empire, the same being the year in which the mighty Quraish suffered a defeat at the hands of the helpless Muslims at Badr.

“In 624 he (Heraclius) advanced into northern Media, where he destroyed the great fire-temple of Goudzak” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Art. “Chosroes II”). In the same year, 313 Muslims, many of whom were raw, inexperienced youths without any arms, routed a strong force of about a thousand of the Quraish warriors, killing all the leaders and dealing a deathblow to the power of the enemy. The successes of the Muslim army, on the one hand, and of the Romans, on the other, continued until the Quraish were utterly crushed by the conquest of Makkah in 630, while “the Persian Empire, from the apparent greatness which it had reached ten years ago, sank into hopeless anarchy” (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Rodwell tries to mitigate the force of the prophecy by saying that the vowel-points were given later, and therefore the prophecy could be read either way, i.e., either as translated above, “And they, after their defeat, will gain victory”, or reading *sa-yughlabûn*, “And they, after their defeat, will be defeated”. In fact, thus read the statement is quite meaningless, because there is no sense at all in saying that *they will be defeated after their defeat*. The addition, however, of the words *on that day the believers will rejoice* makes it quite certain that the word is *yaghlibûn* — they will gain victory — as it was the victory of the Romans which could make the believers rejoice. There is no doubt that actual ignorance of the manner in which the revelation of the Qur’ân was propagated is the only excuse one can offer for such an absurd suggestion. Every portion revealed was committed to memory by large numbers and was repeated over and over in prayers in congregation, and the vowel-points *could not* be left undecided. Moreover, there is clear evidence that when this verse was revealed, Abû Bakr asserted in a public assembly that the Romans would defeat their enemies within three years, and Ubayy ibn Khalf, an unbeliever, denied this, and ten camels were betted on the issue. This coming to the Holy Prophet’s knowledge, he told Abû Bakr that the time-limit of three years was not correct, for *bi’* signified *from three to nine* years. The time-limit was accordingly extended and the bet raised to a hundred camels (*Jâmi’ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî). This further shows how sure were the companions

and the Holy Prophet himself of the fulfilment of the prophecy. Betting, of course, was disallowed long afterwards in Madīnah.

4 Within nine years. Allāh's is the command before and after. And on that day the believers will rejoice

5 In Allāh's help.^a He helps whom He pleases, and He is the Mighty, the Merciful —

6 (It is) Allāh's promise! Allāh will not fail in His promise, but most people know not.

7 They know the outward of this world's life, but of the Hereafter they are heedless.

8 Do they not reflect within themselves? Allāh did not create the *samâwât* and the earth and what is between them but with truth, and (for) an appointed term. And surely most of the people are deniers of the meeting with their *Rabb*.

9 Have they not travelled in the earth and seen what was the end of those before them? They were stronger than these in prowess, and dug up the earth,^a and built on it more than these have built. And their messengers came to them with clear arguments. So it was not Allāh, Who wronged them, but they wronged themselves.

5a. The help of Allāh is the help that was over and over again promised to the believers against the idolatrous Makkans. Thus we have here a clear prophecy of the victory of the Muslims over the Makkans within nine years from the pronouncement of the prophecy. It was fulfilled in the battle of Badr.

9a. The digging of the earth includes its ploughing for cultivation, its digging for minerals and the making of aqueducts, as also the laying of the foundations of buildings.

10 Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the messages of Allāh and mocked at them.

SECTION 2: **The two Parties**

11 Allāh originates the creation, (and) then reproduces it, (and) then to Him you will be returned.

12 And the day when the Hour comes, the guilty will despair.

13 And they will have no intercessors from among their associate-gods,^a and they will deny their associate-gods.

14 And the day when the Hour comes, that day they will be separated one from the other.

15 Then as to those who believed and did good, they will be made happy in a garden.

16 And as for those who disbelieved and rejected Our messages and the meeting of the Hereafter, they will be brought to chastisement.

17 So glory be to Allâh when you enter the evening and when you enter the morning.

18 And to Him be praise in the *samâwât* and the earth, and in the afternoon, and when the sun declines.^a

13a Associate-deities mean the pagan human made deities.

18a. The five times of prayer are clearly indicated in this and the previous verse, the evening prayer comprising both the prayer at sunset and the later evening prayer. The five times of prayer were observed at Makkah, and places at which the Muslims gathered for prayers are mentioned in reports relating to very early days of the Prophet's mission.

19 He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and gives life to the earth after its death. And thus will you be brought forth.^a

SECTION 3: Manifestations of Divine Power in Nature

20 And of His signs is this, that He created you from *turâb* (inorganic matter), then lo! You are mortals (who) scatter.

21 And of His signs is this, that He created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion.^a Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.

22 And of His signs are the creation of the *samâwât* and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned.

23 And of His signs is your sleep by night and by day and your seeking of His bounty. Surely there are signs in this for a people who would hear.

24 And of His signs is this, that He shows you the lightning for fear and for hope, and sends down water from the cloud, then gives life therewith to the earth after its death. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand.

19a. This clearly points to the rising of a great nation from the Arabs, who were religiously as well as intellectually dead.

21a. The close relation between the male and the female (i.e., husband and wife) is expressed in words which indicate the closeness of the union to such an extent as to have misled many to suppose that the act of the physical creation of the female from the male is implied. But the Qur'ân explains itself when it refers to the ties of love and compassion, and to the quietness of mind which a married person finds in his mate. The verse gives us the Islâmic ideal of marriage which serves the purpose not only of the increase of the human race but also that of the religious advancement of both the man and the woman by referring to the quietness of mind which they find in each other.

25 And of His signs is this, that the *samâ'* and the earth subsist by His command. Then when He calls you — from the earth — lo! You come forth.

26 And His is whosoever is in the *samâwât* and the earth. All are obedient to Him.

27 And He it is, Who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and it is very easy to Him. And His is the most exalted state in the *samâwât* and the earth; and He is the Mighty, the Wise.^a

SECTION 4: Appeal to Human Nature

28 He sets forth to you a parable relating to yourselves.^a Have you among those whom your right hands possess partners in that which We have provided you with, so that with respect to it you are alike — you fear them as you fear each other? Thus do We make the messages clear for a people who understand.

29 Nay, those who are unjust follow their low desires without any knowledge; so who can guide him whom Allâh leaves in error? And they shall have no helpers.

27a. *Mathal*, the word translated as *state* here, means really *sifat*, i.e., *description, condition, state or case*; and it is then used as meaning *a description by way of comparison or a similitude* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

28a. If the master and the slave are not equal, how can inanimate objects, such as stones, from among His creatures be equal to the Creator, Who is the Intelligent Cause and Controller of all?

30 So set your face for *dîn* (the way of life as prescribed by Allâh), being upright, the nature made by Allâh in which He has created human beings. There is no altering Allâh's creation. That is the right *dîn* (the way of life as prescribed by Allâh) — but most people know not^a—

31 Turning to Him; and keep your duty to Him and keep up prayer and be not of the polytheists,

32 Of those who split up their way of life as prescribed by Allâh and become parties; every sect rejoicing in that which is with it.

33 And when harm afflicts human beings, they call upon their *Rabb*, turning to Him, then when He makes them taste of mercy from Him, lo! Some of them begin to associate (others) with their *Rabb*,

34 So as to be ungrateful for that which We have given them. So enjoy yourselves a while — you will soon come to know.

35 Or, have We sent to them an authority so that it speaks of that which they associate with Him?^a

30a. Islâm according to this verse is the natural way of life as prescribed by Allâh of human beings, or a way of life as prescribed by Allâh to the truth of which human nature bears testimony. Its fundamental principles, the Unity and all-comprehensive providence of Allâh, the universality of Divine revelation, and the accountability for all actions in a life after death, are recognized by all religions and all nations, and their universal acceptance is a clear evidence that it is the very nature of human beings that bears testimony to their truth. Islâm removes all limitations upon these three fundamental doctrines of the way of life as prescribed by Allâh of humanity, and gives them as wide a significance as humanity itself. No other way of life as prescribed by Allâh in the world has claimed to be the natural way of life as prescribed by Allâh of human beings. There is a saying of the Holy Prophet to the same effect: “Every child that is born conforms to the true way of life as prescribed by Allâh (literally, *human nature*), then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian, as a beast is born entire in all its limbs (or without a defect); do you see one born maimed and

mutilated?” Then he repeated (i.e., in support of what he said): “The nature made by Allâh in which He has created human beings; there is no altering Allâh’s creation. That is the right way of life as prescribed by Allâh” (Bukhârî 23:93). For the meaning of *fitrah*, see 35:1a. The other fundamental principle of the natural way of life as prescribed by Allâh of human beings is referred to further on in verses 38, 39.

35a. No prophet can be shown to have received a revelation setting up creatures on an equal or co-operative plane with the Creator. Every such doctrine, besides being against the testimony of human nature and reason, stands condemned because of the absence of any revelation in its support.

38a. Charity to human beings is the practical outcome of the doctrine of the brotherhood of human beings, which is one of the two principles of the natural religion of human beings. As Islâm has made the doctrine of the brotherhood of human beings a practical doctrine, it is always referred to in the Qur’ân in words enjoining charity on human beings for his or her fellow-human beings.

39a. This verse lays stress upon the doctrine of charity to one’s fellow-human beings. It says that some human beings there are who seek to increase their wealth by means of getting interest on money, i.e., they seek an increase of their wealth at the expense of other human being’s property; but that a Muslim should seek an increase of his or her wealth by giving it, for the sake of Allâh, to help his or her fellow-human beings.

36 And when We make people taste of mercy they rejoice in it, and if an evil befall them for what their hands have already wrought, lo! They despair.

37 See they not that Allâh enlarges provision and straitens (it) for whom He pleases? Certainly there are signs in this for a people who believe.

38 So give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarer. This is best for those who desire Allâh’s pleasure, and these it is who are successful.^a

39 And whatever you lay out at usury, so that it may increase in the property of human beings, it increases not with Allâh; and whatever you give in charity, desiring Allâh’s pleasure — these will get manifold.^a

40 Allâh is He Who created you, then He sustains you, then He causes you to die, then brings you to life. Is there any of your associate-gods^a who does aught of it? Glory be to Him, and exalted be He above what they associate (with Him)!

40a Associate-gods mean the pagan human made deities.

SECTION 5: A Transformation

41 Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of that which human being's hands have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return.^a

42 Say: Travel in the land, then sees what the end of those was before! Most of them were polytheists.^a

43 Then set yourself, being upright, to the right religion before there come from Allâh the day which cannot be averted: on that day they will be separated.

41a. History bears evidence to the truth of these words. Before the advent of the Holy Prophet, corruption prevailed in all countries of the world. The *sea* may here signify the *islands*. Darkness prevailed in all countries of the world, affecting the beliefs of men as well as their deeds. Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Zoroastrianism had long ceased to have any healthy effect on the lives of their votaries, and the followers of these religions had not only ceased to practise virtue, but, worst of all, they had begun to look upon vice as virtue, and many of them attributed indecent and immoral practices to their sages and their gods. Christianity, which was then the youngest of the religions of the world, had also lost its purity. "The Christianity of the seventh century was itself decrepit and corrupt," is Muir's verdict. Such widespread corruption had never previously existed in the world's history. A recent writer, J.H. Denison, writes in *Emotion as the Basis of Civilization*: "In the fifth and sixth centuries, the civilized world stood on the verge of chaos. The old emotional cultures that had made civilization possible, since they had given to men a sense of unity and of reverence for their rulers, had broken down and nothing had been found adequate to take their place.... It seemed then that the great civilization which it had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of disintegration, and that mankind was likely to return to that condition of barbarism where every tribe and sect was against the next and law and order were unknown.... Civilization like a gigantic tree whose foliage had over reached the world ... stood tottering ... rotting to the core" (pages 265 –268). And then adds, speaking of Arabia: "It was among these people that the man was born who was to unite the whole known world of the east and south" (page 269). With the light of Islâm, and through the torch of knowledge and

civilization lit in Arabia, a new era dawned not only over Arabia, but also over other countries. Europe remained the longest in darkness, and it was only after the torch of knowledge had been lighted in Spain by the Muslims that both the Renaissance and the Reformation came.

42a. The doctrine of Unity had been forgotten by all nations; even the Jews submitted to the decisions of their learned men with a submission which was only due to God. That Christianity had long before forsaken the doctrine of Unity goes without saying.

44 Whoever disbelieves will be responsible for his disbelief; and whoever does good, such prepare (good) for their own *nafs*,

45 That He may reward out of His grace those who believe and do good. Surely He loves not the disbelievers.

46 And of His signs is this that He sends forth the winds bearing good news, and that He may make you taste of His mercy, and that the ships may glide by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may be grateful.^a

47 And certainly We sent before you messengers to their people, so they came to them with clear arguments, then We punished those who were guilty. And to help believers is ever incumbent on Us.

48 Allâh is He Who sends forth the winds, so they raise a cloud, then He spreads it forth in the sky as He pleases, and He breaks it, so that you see the rain coming forth from inside it; then when He causes it to fall upon whom He pleases of His servants, lo! They rejoice —

49 Though they were before this, before it was sent down upon them, in sure despair.

50 Look then at the signs of Allâh's mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death. Surely He is the Quickener of the dead; and He is Possessor of power over all things.

46a. The verse calls attention to the change that was already coming over the peninsula; this was a clear indication of the mighty transformation that was ultimately to be brought about.

51 And if We send a wind and they see it yellow, they would after that certainly continue to disbelieve.^a

52 So surely you canst not make the dead to hear, nor canst you make the deaf to hear the call, when they turn back retreating.

53 Nor can you guide the blind out of their error. You can make none to hear but those who believe in Our messages, so they submit.

SECTION 6: Overthrow of Opposition

54 Allâh is He Who created you from a state of weakness, then He gave strength after weakness, then ordained weakness and hoary hair after strength.^a He creates what He pleases, and He is the Knowing, the Powerful.

55 And the day when the Hour comes, the guilty will swear: They did not tarry but an hour. Thus are they ever turned away.

56 And those who are given knowledge and faith will say: Certainly you tarried according to the ordinance of Allâh till the day of Resurrection — so this is the day of Resurrection — but you did not know.

57 So that day their excuse will not profit those who were unjust, nor will they be granted goodwill.

51a. *It*, in this verse, refers to the *seed-produce*, which is meant by the expression “gives life to the earth” in the previous verse; the meaning is, the seed-produce may be rendered yellow or caused to wither away by a blast of the wind. The allusion is to the disasters which would strike a blow at the disbelievers’ plans. It also refers to their persistence in disbelief, in spite of the afflictions which they experience.

54a. There is a deeper reference here to the law of the rise, growth and decay of nations.

58 And certainly We have set forth for human beings in this Qur’ân every kind of parable. And if you bring them a sign, those who disbelieve would certainly say: You are naught but deceivers.

59 Thus does Allâh seal the hearts of those who know not.^a

60 So be patient; surely the promise of Allâh is true; and let not those disquiet you who have no certainty.

59a. Allâh's sealing the hearts thus really means their own persistence in disbelief and wickedness, as the preceding verse shows.